

Great Plains Annual Conference Parsonage Standards

Introduction

1. It is the expectation of the Great Plains Conference of The United Methodist Church that each church or charge will meet the requirements of the current Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church regarding the provision of either a parsonage or a housing allowance for the pastor or pastors appointed to that church or charge.
2. The pastor shall consider the parsonage as the church's property; the church shall consider the parsonage as the pastor's home.
3. Under some circumstances, the unusual needs of a particular clergy family or the exceptionally strong preference of the family or local church may warrant the choice of housing other than a church-owned parsonage. Such a choice may be pursued only under the supervision of the District Superintendent.
4. Definitions
 - a. The term pastor or pastors in this policy means those people under the itinerant system and under appointment by the Bishop or assigned by the District Superintendent.
 - b. The term "housing allowance" means those funds provided by a local church or charge to its pastor for housing in lieu of a parsonage.
5. These policies also apply to district parsonages which are the responsibility of the Conference Trustees as advised by the Superintendency Committees.
6. The parsonage is the primary/required method of housing for pastors, churches and pastoral charges. In some settings, the parsonage has been sold, and a housing allowance is provided in accordance with the Book of Discipline as part of the support package for the pastor. At each appointment change, the housing allowance/parsonage requirement will be evaluated. The church/charge will need to be prepared to return to a parsonage provision if the situation requires it.

The Parsonage Option

1. If the parsonage option is utilized by the local church, charge, or District, then the following should be recognized by all of the parties involved: The parsonage is provided as a private home for the clergy and the clergy's household.
2. The maintenance, upkeep, and improvements of the parsonage are the mutual responsibility of the church, charge, parish, or District (or Parsonage Committee), the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee (or other appropriate personnel committee), and the clergy's household.
 - a. The Board of Trustees (or Parsonage Committee) shall be responsible for contracting and providing for the necessary repairs or improvements in a timely manner.
 - b. The Pastor/Parish Relations Committee (or appropriate personnel committee) shall be expected to consult with the clergy about the needs of the parsonage, and to advocate for Conference standards.
 - c. The clergy's household shall care for the parsonage with the same respect as if it belongs to them, and be responsible for the repair of careless or unusual damage, as well as leaving the

parsonage clean when moving from it.

3. We call attention of the local church or charge Board of Trustees and Pastor/Parish Relations Committee to ¶ 2543.3 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church-2012*:
 - b) ... In the case of the purchase of a parsonage, the Board of Trustees shall either:
 - (1) Purchase a parsonage that has on the ground-floor level:
 - a) One room that can be used as a bedroom by a person with a disability;
 - b) One fully accessible bathroom; and
 - c) Full accessible laundry facilities; or
 - (2) Purchase a parsonage without the accessible features for people with disabilities specified above and remodel it within one year's time, so that it does have those features.

It is expected that churches or charges will bring their parsonages into compliance with the requirements set forth below if they are not yet in compliance. The requirements provide a basic standard of living which parsonage families reasonably expect in every appointment.

4. It is required by *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church-2012* that:
 - a. An annual examination of the parsonage be made by the chairperson of the Board of Trustees or other responsible body (or Parsonage Committee), the chairperson of the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee or other like body, and the clergy and spouse (if any), at the convenience of the clergy's household, and that a report of this examination be filed with the District Superintendent or other supervisory person or body.
 - b. A program of annual maintenance and upkeep be established and reported to the Church Council or the appropriate oversight body.
 - c. A long-range program be adopted to either bring the parsonage up to, or maintain Conference and Disciplinary requirements.
 - d. Normal wear and use is expected on all parsonages. The church, charge, parish, or District electing the parsonage option shall establish a budget line item annually for the interior and exterior maintenance, redecorating, and/or modification of the parsonage to be used at the discretion of the parsonage resident(s) after consultation with the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee or other appropriate oversight body.
5. Requirements for Parsonages are as follows:
 - a. Living Area
 - i. Carpeting or finished floors
 - ii. Appropriate window treatments for privacy. All materials shall be fire retardant.
 - iii. Guest closet.
 - iv. Entry door shall have a window or device by which a caller may be observed before door is opened.
 - v. Locks on all doors and windows providing ingress adequate to reasonably prevent home invasion.
 - vi. Outlets for electricity, telephone and/or other telecommunication devices, and cable

television, if available.

- vii. Electrical outlets in particular should be numerous enough for the electrical appliances that are common, such as TV, DVD player, computers, telephone answering machines, stereos, and etc., so that one outlet does not pose a fire risk.
 - viii. Large living room with family room removed from it so that activities in one do not disturb people in the other.
 - ix. Living room isolated from normal traffic pattern.
 - x. If there is no office/study in the church, the parsonage should have a room available for an office/study. The office/study should have built in bookshelves.
 - xi. Adequate fire exits from all areas of the house; especially the basement. Fire extinguishers available on all levels.
- b. Kitchen/Dining Area
- i. Refrigerator with freezer compartment of at least 2.5. cubic feet of capacity.
 - ii. Stove with oven, big enough to prepare a meal for a household of four.
 - iii. Dining area in or near kitchen or in separate room adequate for a household of four.
 - iv. Permanent cupboards/storage spaces that are accessible and adequate for the storage of dishes, pots and pans, and food for a household of four.
 - v. Sink and counter space with sufficient work area.
 - vi. Dishwasher.
 - vii. Garbage disposal.
 - viii. Exhaust fan.
 - ix. Fire extinguisher.
 - x. Outlets for electricity, telephone and/or other telecommunication devices, and cable television
 - Electrical outlets in particular should be numerous enough for the electrical appliances that are common, such as microwave oven, can opener, food processor, coffee maker, and etc., so that one outlet does not pose a fire risk.
- c. Bathroom Area
- i. One full bath and one-half bath area, with fixtures and plumbing for same. One bath must be on the main floor.
 - ii. Storage spaces for linens and other bathroom items.
 - iii. Medicine cabinet.
 - iv. Outlets for electricity that are Ground Fault Interrupters (GFI).
 - v. An exhaust fan is recommended.
- d. Bedroom Area
- i. Three bedrooms, the master bedroom shall be at least 150 square feet, and the others are at least 100 square feet. If a two-story building, one bedroom shall be on the main floor.
 - ii. Closet space in each bedroom.
 - iii. Carpeting or finished floors and curtains or window treatments provided in each room.
 - iv. Outlets for electricity, telephones and/or other telecommunication devices, and cable TV.

- v. Egress window in any basement bedroom: provision for egress in all bedrooms.
- e. Laundry Facilities
 - i. Automatic washer and dryer.
 - ii. Water softener in hard water areas.
 - iii. Cleanable flooring.
- f. Storage Space
 - i. An indoor storage space for seasonal and other items.
- g. Insurance
 - i. Replacement insurance coverage, including liability and vandalism on parsonage and church-owned furnishings.
 - ii. Clergy must insure personal contents.
- h. Heating and Air Conditioning
 - i. Central heating thermostatically controlled with provision for heating every room in the house.
 - ii. Carbon Monoxide detector(s), if the heating system is not electric.
 - iii. Central air conditioning or 220 outlet for provided window air conditioning.
 - iv. Equipment and screen for fireplace, as needed.
 - v. Chimneys shielded to prevent entrance of foreign materials.
- i. Garage and Grounds Area
 - i. Two-car garage recommended, one-car garage required.
 - ii. Storage space for outdoor equipment.
 - iii. Safe place and approved container for disposing of trash.
 - iv. Landscaped grounds and have appropriate sidewalks.
 - v. Play area in the back.
 - vi. All turf grass management is the responsibility of the church using the most environmentally friendly methods possible. Lawn mowing will be the responsibility of the pastor.
- j. Electricity
 - i. Minimum of 200 ampere entrance box.
 - ii. Light fixtures in each room.
 - iii. Circuits for all heavy duty appliances in appropriate places.
 - iv. Accessible switches and outlets in every room.
 - v. All wiring and electrical devices (including GFI-protected outlets where specified) to meet National Electric Code.
- k. Interior of House
 - i. Window shades or other window treatments provided with appropriate insulation for energy efficiency.
 - ii. Appropriate insulation as recommended by the federal government
 - iii. Curtains or other window treatments for unusual size or number of windows.
 - iv. Stairways big enough for moving furniture and well lighted.
 - v. Private telephone line (i.e., a line that is also the church's line is not a private line as referred to here), and one telephone.
 - vi. Smoke detector.

- I. Outside of House
 - i. TV antenna or satellite dish, if cable TV lines are not available, otherwise cable TV lines.
 - ii. Lightning rods where recommended.
 - iii. Combination storm windows and screens.
 - iv. Provision for escape in case of fire.
 - m. Regular Testing
 - i. For termites.
 - ii. For potable water if the water for the parsonage is from a private well and not a public utility.
 - iii. Testing should be conducted for Radon gas as is warranted.
 - iv. Inspection of all heating equipment and church-owned appliances.
 - v. Annual inspection of air conditioning and electrical wiring.
 - n. Maintenance Budget
 - i. For the local church or charge only: two percent (2%) of the replacement value of the parsonage shall be a budgeted item in the local churches or charges operational budget for maintenance.
6. Home Business
- a. No business enterprise shall be located in a parsonage that would threaten the tax exempt status of the parsonage.
 - b. All questions about home businesses should be referred to the Conference Chancellor and all legal costs shall be paid by the pastor.
 - c. If, in the opinion of the Conference Chancellor, a particular home business would not threaten the tax-exempt status of a parsonage, this must be communicated in writing to the District Superintendent.
7. Care of Parsonages
- a. It is the responsibility of the clergy to leave the parsonage in a reasonably undamaged and clean state, excluding normal wear and tear. It is the clergy's responsibility to immediately report any extensive or unusual damage to the parsonage to the Chairpersons of the local Board of Trustees, the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee, the Parsonage Committee (if any), and the District Superintendent (if necessary).
 - b. Upon moving into a parsonage, the clergyperson, a representative of the Board of Trustees and a representative of the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee shall inspect the parsonage and jointly verify in writing its cleanliness and compliance with conference standards, noting in specific any exceptions found. A standard cleaning check sheet and a standard condition/damages worksheet shall be filled out and signed by all parties. Copies of both worksheets shall be sent to the District Superintendent.
 - c. Upon exiting the parsonage, the clergyperson, a representative of the Board of Trustees and a representative of the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee shall also inspect the parsonage using the condition/damages worksheet, noting any repairs that need to be made and whose responsibility it is to pay for such repairs. It will be noted which appliances remain in the parsonage. The location of warranties and operating instructions for parsonage equipment shall be identified for the benefit of the incoming pastor. A copy of the exiting

worksheet, signed by both parties, shall be forwarded to the District Superintendent along with the cleaning check sheet.

- d. A photographic record shall be made of any damages discovered during the exit inspection and determined to be the responsibility of the clergyperson. This photograph shall be filed with the local church trustees, who will submit a bid for the necessary repair work. A copy of this bid will be forwarded to both the pastor and the District Superintendent in whose district the parsonage is located. The chairperson of the local Board of Trustees will notify the District Superintendent when these repair costs have been paid in full.

8. Housing Allowance in Lieu of Parsonage

If a housing allowance in lieu of a parsonage is the option that the church or charge provides:

- a. The housing allowance in lieu of parsonage shall be set at fair market value.
 - i. The funds provided to a pastor or pastors for a housing allowance in lieu of a parsonage shall be used for payment of appropriate housing related expenses.
- b. In any case, the housing allowance option and the amount offered must be agreed to by the local church or charge, the pastor, and the District Superintendent, and shall be an amount adequate to meet the housing requirements for parsonages given above.
- c. Any other agreements as to a housing allowance (e.g., closing costs on a home purchased by the pastor, limitations on area, or buy-back agreements) are strictly between the church or charge, its pastor, and the District Superintendent. However, individual members shall be discouraged from making unsecured or signature loans to the current or former pastor(s) of the church or charge for the purchase of a home.
- d. A church or charge that is moving from the parsonage option to the housing allowance option shall provide, in writing, to the District Superintendent:
 - i. a statement that the church or charge is planning such a change;
 - ii. Include in the initial statement the church or charge's long-range plans for funding a housing allowance.
- e. Each church of a charge utilizing the housing allowance option shall annually report to the District Superintendent, in writing, their commitment to and plans for the funding of a housing allowance.

9. Parsonage Care in Multi-Church Charges and Two Charge Appointments Involving Clergy Couples.

- a. The District Superintendent, Pastor(s), and Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee shall consult and consider in which parsonage the pastor(s) will reside when there is more than one parsonage available. It is recommended that the Pastor(s) visit all available parsonages. The District Superintendent will be responsible for the final decision as to which parsonage shall be used.
- b. Basic routine maintenance will be shared by each church in the charge or charges for the parsonage where the pastor(s) resides. The amount will be in proportion to the percentage each church pays toward the pastor's compensation.
- c. Churches in such situations have two options regarding capital improvements to a parsonage:
 - i. The church holding title to the parsonage will be responsible for all capital

improvements costs for the parsonage.

- ii. All churches involved may choose to share the costs of capital improvements to a parsonage with the understanding that, pursuant to the current Book of Discipline, if such churches are no longer together as a charge, all churches who have contributed to capital improvements shall have a proportionate claim on the fair market value of the parsonage at the time of the dissolution of the charge.

10. Further Recommendations:

- a. Prior to the purchase of a house to be used as a parsonage, a thorough professional termite inspection shall be conducted.
- b. In any new construction:
 - i. Energy conservation shall be a primary consideration.
 - ii. Sound conditioning should be considered if a room is to be used as a conference or counseling room.